Hadley

Personal Safety and Vision Loss

Presented by Ricky Enger

**Ricky Enger:** Welcome to Hadley Presents. I'm your host, Ricky Enger, inviting you to sit back, relax and enjoy a conversation with the experts. In this episode, Hadley's Chief Program Officer, Ed Haines, joins us to discuss strategies for self-defense. Welcome to the show, Ed.

**Ed Haines:** Thanks, Ricky. Very glad to be here.

**Ricky Enger:** So glad to have you. And if anyone is listening who has been with Hadley for a while, they're probably delighted that you're here to talk about self-defense because I know that you actually taught this course when Hadley had more of a focus on courses as opposed to workshops that we do now. Before we get into talking about self-defense, maybe you can just give us a bit of background about yourself, especially as it relates to your experience with self-defense?

**Ed Haines:** Sure, Ricky. As you mentioned, I did teach a Hadley course entitled Personal Safety Self-Defense Strategies for many, many years. And it was a great topic, and a lot of folks were really interested in it then, as they are interested in this subject now. And I've also had a lifelong interest at this point in martial arts, it's a real passion for me.

**Ricky Enger:** Wonderful. And we're happy to have you here to talk about it. As you alluded to, this was a really popular topic when you taught it previously and it comes up all the time, even now, people are asking for strategies and things like that. So why do you suppose this is so top of mind for our members or our audience?

**Ed Haines:** Well, you're right, it is top of mind for our members, but I'll start off by saying that personal safety and self-defense is really top of mind for every person, no matter their level of vision. But there are a couple of issues that come up for people who have recently lost vision that make them a little more sensitive to the issue of self-defense. The first is that sighted individuals use their vision as a self-defense strategy.

**Ricky Enger:** Right.

**Ed Haines:** You're walking down the street, you're scoping out what kind of people look a little dicey, what kind of alley looks a little unusual, what's going on around you? So you're using your vision a lot. If you lose that capacity to use your vision as a self-defense strategy and you haven't learned new strategies to take its place, naturally you become a little more nervous and you wonder, "How am I going to cope?"

The other issue, it's something that comes up particularly in the United States, is that when you recently have lost your vision, very commonly, you've also lost the ability to drive a private vehicle.

**Ricky Enger:** Right.

**Ed Haines:** This comes up all the time. I used to ask folks I worked with, "What's the most dangerous situation that you've ever been in?" And 90% of the time they'd say, "The bus stop." When you have to use public transportation, you are constantly compelled to be in public areas where you can't control the people around you. You can't control who's going to be sitting next to you, who's going to be walking towards you. You have to stay in one spot. You can't move if you feel nervous because you're waiting for transportation, you're waiting on street corners for Uber rides, in front of grocery stores for the paratransit. So using public transportation brings a whole new level of awareness of potentially dangerous situations, and that's something people really grapple with initially.

**Ricky Enger:** Those are all really good points, and I'd never framed it in quite that way. When you have a personal vehicle, it feels a bit more like you have some control that now you don't anymore. That's really interesting. When I think about self-defense, what immediately comes to mind for me is stomp down on the instep or use your fingers to go for their eyes or whatever, all of these physical things that you might respond with. But maybe I'm not thinking about it in the right way. Is self-defense purely a physical thing or is there more to it than that?

**Ed Haines:** Ricky, that's a great question because in fact, there is a lot more to it to it than that. In fact, self-defense really is 90% avoidance. There's a lot of issues with learning and employing physical techniques. I'm willing to bet that a lot of our members out there have been to seminars that teach us some basic self-defense moves, and those are perfectly legitimate and certainly they're not unhelpful. But physical techniques related to self-defense are just like other physical techniques. They require practice. They really require hours and hours of practice to commit to muscle memory. They really have to be automatic. So if you learn something in a seminar that you take home, you feel reasonably confident with it, you try it out on one of your family members a few times, that's pretty common. That's great, and you may remember to use that, but in the event of an attack, your responses have to be automatic.

Most fights just last a few seconds. It's not like in the movies where people slug it out for five minutes and the hero eventually wins. Most fights end up on the ground, and that requires a whole other skill level. So the point is really to not allow yourself to reach that level of confrontation. What I'd really like to talk about today, Ricky, is the attitudes and strategies that you can employ just to stay out of harm's way. A lot of these concepts are really based on the material from this great book called Safe Without Sight. It's by Wendy David, Kerry Kollmar, and Scott McCall, and it's available on Amazon and it's on Bard. We'll have this in the resource notes as well, but I'm just going to be talking about material essentially from that terrific book.

**Ricky Enger:** That's great. And what you said was kind of a powerful statement. Obviously if it comes to a physical thing, there are all of these strategies that we can use, but ideally you want to just not even be in the situation in the first place. Can you talk about some of those strategies for just avoiding being in that kind of confrontation?

**Ed Haines:** Yeah, I'd love to. Avoidance is really multifaceted. It sounds like a simple word, basically thinking, "Let's just stay away from trouble," but that's not what it's about. Avoidance really has three components, awareness, intuition, and boundary setting. Those words may sound obvious and intuitive, but unless you put awareness, intuition, and boundary setting into real and consistent practice, they're not effective. So it takes work. Real avoidance takes building up habits and behaviors over a long period of time. You've got to be committed.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah, that makes sense. It's not going to be something that just automatically comes naturally to all of us. As you said, they all do seem like pretty simple words or strategies, but if I'm thinking about them, now I'm wondering, "Okay, how do I even put any of this into practice?" So why don't we just break it down further? Starting with awareness. What exactly does that mean and how can you practice being more aware?

**Ed Haines:** Okay, great. I'd love to start with this. There's two parts to the awareness equation. The first part is being aware of everything around you, and that means living in the present, being aware of noises, smells, voices, structural and geographic elements like alleys, parks, or doorways.

**Ricky Enger:** Right.

**Ed Haines:** And then also being aware of changes in your environment. For instance, vocal tones that you don't recognize or voices or noises that suddenly get closer or suddenly get farther away, or even voices or noises that suddenly unusually stop. It requires a lot of concentration, and this means reducing distractions and things like cell phones, your Spotify list. But most important of all, being aware of your environment means reducing that internal dialogue that commands our attention. I'm talking about the voice we have in our head that talks about our workday, what we're going to make for dinner, what we forgot to say to a relative last week. All that stuff that diverts your attention from really being aware of what's around you and really practicing awareness 100%.

There's a second part to the awareness issue, and that means being aware of what's coming ahead, not what's around you now, but what's going to be coming towards you or what's coming in your future. That means knowing your routes, your directions, your landmarks, possible areas of danger, things like that. Knowing your neighborhood, knowing what personal information people have access to. Of course, you don't give strangers personal information, but also be aware that potential predators may be listening in on your cell phones or your conversations. Also being aware of your own home. Is there something out of place or something different? I'm not talking about paranoia really, simply just a consistent focus of attention, attention to what is around you now and what will be around you in the future.

And there's a really famous study that was done where they got a bunch of seasoned predators, criminals and played for them videos of people walking down the street, and they asked them just one question. They said, "Which of these individuals would you target as a potential victim?" It's really interesting. They all chose the same individuals. And what's even more interesting is that those individuals had nothing in common. They didn't have gender or age or size in common, except the one thing they had in common is all the individuals that were picked out as potential victims moved in an uncertain and confused way. So when I talk about awareness, the ultimate goal then is being confident as you travel.

**Ricky Enger:** Wow, that is a lot to take in. So you're having to think about what's around you rather than what's coming up for dinner or whatever, and think about where you're headed next, and also portray that sense of confidence. It turns out that if you look vulnerable in terms of not as you say, size or gender or whatever, but just in how you're presenting yourself, then you might be more likely to be a target. Wow.

**Ed Haines:** Yeah, absolutely. So it's projecting confidence and assertiveness.

**Ricky Enger:** The next piece of this then is intuition. And for whatever reason, I think a lot of us have been conditioned to either ignore intuition or to just put it down a little further in our priorities. We're taught to be logical and think things through, but sometimes there's that little voice that says, "Something's not right." How do we talk about intuition and how we can put that into practice?

**Ed Haines:** Sure, I'd love to. Intuition is a very basic and primal survival mechanism, and we don't employ it often enough. Let me ask you this Ricky, have you ever had a conversation with someone, and the subject matter seemed innocent enough, but it didn't feel that way, the conversation didn't feel comfortable?

**Ricky Enger:** Oh, yeah, definitely. I couldn't point to anything specific, but there was just that feeling of there's more here than is on the surface.

**Ed Haines:** Absolutely. And then have you ever walked into a room like an office or a classroom and just something felt off?

**Ricky Enger:** Oh, this happens a lot. It's all fine or whatever, but yeah, there is that feeling, just the hair might stand up a little bit or you get that little niggling feeling in the pit of your stomach, something's not right.

**Ed Haines:** Yep, and that's an instinct we all have. And then finally, I bet you've heard a sound in the night at your home and suddenly woke up and went, "Oh, what's that?"

**Ricky Enger:** Yep. Straight up, awake. Yeah.

**Ed Haines:** It's all happened to us. The thing is though, we rarely act on these feelings because we're trained to be polite, and we're trained to be reasonable. Ricky, someone makes us feel uncomfortable, but we don't want to offend them. We tell ourselves they must be harmless because they're a co-worker or an acquaintance, or we don't want to make a scene. You walk into a hotel room, it feels weird, but gosh, you don't want to go down to the front desk for assistance. So you tell yourself, "It's nothing. It's fine."

Then you hear a noise at night, and again, you don't want to call the police because you don't want your neighbors to see a police car outside your door. A lot of times it is our imagination. So we say, "It's just my imagination." We all know what intuition is, but here's the secret to intuition. The point about intuition is that intuition calls for a corresponding reaction, and that's really the hard part. It's taking action on that intuition. If somebody makes you feel uncomfortable, even without reason, it's incumbent on you to set a boundary between you and that person that's good enough to reduce your unease. That's all you need to do.

If you walk into a room and it feels weird, a classroom, an elevator, a workspace, get out, find someone to accompany you when you go back in, even if it's an inconvenience to them. Trust me, it's just a minor one. And if you hear a noise in your home that alerts and frightens you, these are just examples, it doesn't hurt to call the police. I've talked to several veteran police officers about this. They get calls like this all the time. They're used to it. They won't judge you. And they've all said to me, "I'd much rather get a call for a suspicious noise that results in just a false alarm than get a call about an assault."

So again, intuition requires taking action. Try not to let politeness and reason get in the way of your intuition. You really have nothing to lose by taking action. Generally, we're talking about a minor inconvenience and maybe a minor scene with people you'll probably never meet again. And then responding to your feelings, really what's possible is that you have your safety to gain here.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah. And gosh, that all just sounds so relatable, the, "I don't want to make a stir, I want to be polite." Trying to put that into practice for your safety will take some effort, but as you said, it's well worth it so that you remain safe and maybe a little inconvenienced as opposed to the worst outcome.

**Ed Haines:** Absolutely.

**Ricky Enger:** You mentioned during your talk about intuition, setting a boundary with someone as one of the actions that you can take when you have that intuition. That doesn't come naturally to a lot of people, and I think it’s important to define what that even means and how you would go about it? So can you talk about boundary setting?

**Ed Haines:** Sure, I'd love to. And again, this goes back to most of us are taught to be polite, not to make a scene. "Let's not offend others. Don't raise your voice in public. Don't call attention to yourself or cause anyone any inconvenience." But sometimes these are counterproductive to boundary setting. The first principle I'd love people to take away from this podcast in with regard to boundary setting is that everyone has the right to feel comfortable and safe at all times. That's a human right. But here's the thing, you have to be ready to assert that right. No one's going to do it for you.

So if someone is taking away that essential right to feel safe and comfortable, then really the appropriate response is to defend yourself by setting boundaries. You need to acknowledge you have the right to feel safe, and setting a boundary is maybe necessary to maintain that right. There are different levels, Ricky, to boundary setting, but I'd like to talk about a technique that helps you set boundaries. It's about changing perspective, changing your perspective, and changing the perspective of the person that's making you feel unsafe. Maybe this will help. When a person makes you feel unsafe, stop thinking about them as a person, change your perspective. Stop seeing them as an individual. So what happens is they change from a subject to an object. That's a little philosophical, but mainly what I mean by that is they no longer become an entity with feelings, right?

You're not required to let them share or direct the course of your interaction. You don't care what they think about you or how they feel about you. They really become just a physical barrier between you and that human right to safety, an object really, just like any other that requires removal. Sadly, we know from all sorts of studies and from history, it's much easier to compel people to act with aggression toward others if they stop seeing them as fellow human beings. It's just the way it works.

So the secret here is that any person that's acting toward you in ways that make you feel unsafe has already changed their perspective about you. They don't see you as a person. They're not taking your feelings into account, and if you don't follow suit with that change in perspective, you are going to be at a disadvantage always. Predators know this, and they use this. They know you're likely to respond by being polite, by taking their feelings into consideration, and they know then they'll have the upper hand. So if they're just a boundary between you and safety, your objective is clear. It just becomes a matter of what strategy you use to remove that boundary.

Once you've changed your perspective, that's almost the hardest part because most of us are taught not to do that, then it's time to change theirs. You need to make a potential predator acutely aware that you are more than an object between them and whatever it is they're trying to accomplish. So you need to insist that your feelings and agenda will be considered and make it clear to them you are going to direct the course of interaction with them, and don't let yourself be perceived as a victim.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah, all of this just feels like it ties in together and connects so well. So going back to being perceived as vulnerable that we talked about earlier. If suddenly you're projecting this confidence, that's going to make that person stop and reconsider. What a fascinating way to frame it, just to drop all of those things that we've been taught about civility, which are important except if your personal safety is at stake. So wow, this really is quite a fascinating discussion.

Now, if you go through all of these things and somehow none of them work, you tried avoiding, you tried setting your boundaries, all of these things, and still the threat is there, what happens next? What do you do?

**Ed Haines:** Well, you have only three options, and those are flight, freezing up, which is the same as complying, or fighting back. And there is no right or wrong answer here. It all depends on who you are and what circumstances you're being confronted with. If you're going to fight back, the first rule about fighting back is if there are no rules. You have to be willing to do whatever you can do to survive, and that means being willing to physically harm your attacker, being willing to be seriously injured in order to survive and acting quickly as humanly possible. These aren't easy decisions. It's helpful to think about this way beforehand, because if you're not trained, if you don't have extensive training, you won't have that level of detachment that say a professional fighter is going to have, that chess match attitude. It's not necessarily physical confrontation. It's about what move you're going to make and when, looking forward into the future. You're not in a movie. You're basically fighting for survival.

It helps to make yourself mad. If you're afraid, try to turn your fear into anger and really become just outraged that this person is trying to hurt you and deprive you of your safety or even your life or your future. There’re no good answers to this. It all depends on the situation. But if you decide to fight back, don't hesitate to do everything you possibly can.

I'll give you an example. I worked with an older gentleman who was actually on the ground. His assailant was kneeling over him, and this is going to sound graphic, but the gentleman reached into his pocket, pulled out a pen and stabbed his assailant in the eye. So that being said, the assailant immediately left the scene. In fact, the police found him in an emergency room later. But I tell you this story to say that that's an example of being willing to do whatever you have to do to survive. And that means including injuring your attacker or being willing to be injured yourself.

**Ricky Enger:** Wow, there's really so much to think about here. And a lot of it is stuff I really hadn't considered before. What I'm coming away with here is that it does take practice. It does take thinking about things ahead of time so that you can have that muscle memory to know what to do next rather than trying to make these essential decisions on the fly, having never thought about any of it before. So all of this is really, really good. Any final advice that you would leave people with?

**Ed Haines:** I have one last piece of advice. Never let yourself be taken to a second crime scene. If someone tells you that if you come with them, everything will be fine and you'll be safe, you can assume they're lying. People who allow themselves to be taken to a second crime scene have about a 2% chance of survival. So if I could leave you with parting words, and I know this is not a happy topic, don't let yourself be taken to a second crime scene under any circumstances.

**Ricky Enger:** So whatever it takes, scream, yell, kick, fight, anything. Yeah.

**Ed Haines:** Absolutely, anything. Your chances of survival are greater if you do that.

**Ricky Enger:** Thank you so much for that. And could you repeat the name of the book if people would like some further reading on this? And certainly, we'll have it in the show notes.

**Ed Haines:** Sure. It's called Safe Without Sight. It's a terrific book and it's available on Bard. Last time I checked, it was available on Amazon. And there's another terrific book as well called The Gift of Fear, that's also available on Amazon, I'm sure on Bard as well. A terrific book, and that deals a lot with the issue of intuition. So either of those books I highly recommend.

**Ricky Enger:** Excellent. We will have links to those in the show notes. Ed, thank you again for just sharing a lot of these things that on the surface feel kind of simple, but there's a lot to think about, and I know this is going to be so informative for people.

**Ed Haines:** Well, I really appreciate you having me on to talk about this topic. It's an important one.

**Ricky Enger:** Indeed. Thank you so much.

**Ed Haines:** Thanks.

**Ricky Enger:** Got something to say? Share your thoughts about this episode of Hadley Presents or make suggestions for future episodes. We'd love to hear from you. Send us an email at podcast@hadleyhelps.org. That's P-O-D-C-A-S-T@hadleyhelps.org or leave us a message at (847)-784-2870. Thanks for listening.